

# THE DIMENSIONS OF DURABLE DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** The vision of the strategies concerning durable development starts from the understanding of the fact that a country's economy, as the ones of all the countries, means more than the sum of the components, that the changes that occur in a subsystem or another generate profound general changes, due to the dynamic interdependences that exist between the components.

The concept of durable development, as well as its strategy of accomplishment, raise the problem of man and human collectivity from the perspective of time and space. Such perspectives, that the durable development must integrate, are depending on human culture, experience, on the difficulty and actuality of the problems on each level, on the degree of development and conscription of scientific and technical conquests.

## 1. Defining the concept of durable development

The interest concerning durable development, both in each country and in the entire world, are the result of a complex of questions that generate preoccupation: the poverty in the middle of abundance, the degradation of the environment, the lost of confidence in institutions, the uncontrolled expansion of urbanization, the problem of unemployment, the migration of the young, the change of traditional values, inflation, unemployment and other economic and financial or geopolitical crises.

The first works about the theory and application of durable development had a planetary optics, due to the fact that at this level the negative effects of previous development of mankind were more visible. This does not mean that in some countries had not been created judicial economic-financial elements and educational elements that have become durable developments.

Since 1972, when the Environment Conference in Stockholm took place and up to the present time, more than 60 interpretations of the concept “development” have been identified. The area of these interpretations has two extreme limits: the one that suggests the ending or economic development and the one that increases the role of natural environment.

In the Brundtland report, named “Our Common Future”, presented in the UN Conference in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, durable development is seen as a reconciliation between economy and environment “on a new path of development that would sustain the human progress not only in a few places and for a few years, but on the entire planet and for a long future.

The generally accepted approach is the one of durable development (viable, sustainable), that targets the interaction and compatibility of four systems: economic, human, environmental and technological. This way, the satisfaction of present needs will be ensured without compromising the capacity of future generations to fulfill their own needs.

To realize the conditions of compatibility of the four systems, the strategy of

durable development includes, as an essential element, the simultaneity of progress in all the four dimensions.

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Starting from the five factors that are inter-influencing each other in the process of development, population, natural resources and environment, agricultural production, industrial production and pollution, the strategy of durable development looks for the most adequate criteria for the optimization of the needs-resources report, objectives, the necessary means, based on their compatibility in space and time. There must be conceived and realized such an economical environment that, by its incomes and outcomes, would be in perfect dynamic compatibility with the natural environment and with the needs and interests, present and future, of the generations that live together or follow.

The durable development is defined by: a natural dimension (meaning that this exists as long as the man-made environment is compatible with the natural one), a social human dimension (all exits from the man-made environment must answer the present and future needs and interests of the generations directly ); a national, regional and world-wide dimension (the compatibility of optimizing criteria, both at national, regional or global level).

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In essence, the durable development is defined by the following major elements: permanent and certain compatibility of man-made environment with the natural one; the equity of chances for coexisting generations and the following ones, in time and space; the interpretation of the present through the future, by introducing ecological security as purpose of development; the compatibility of national development strategies by the reflection in each country of geo-economic and ecological interdependences; the change of interest in ensuring the general well-fare to the quality of economic growth; the redefinition of global strategy of development by aiming the human capital, the instructive-cultural factors; finally, the objectives of durable socio-economic development are subordinated, both to the health of man and natural environment, in time and space.

Both the theory and practice of durable development must be based on the compatibility of the politics of ensuring the quality of the results of human activity with the conservationist politics, to avoid some major risks in the course of human activities, by the elaboration of a "Business Chart" in this vision.

Considering the world we live in, from economic and environmental point of view, the studies find two opposite points of view:

a) based on economic indexes that are used to measure the state of health of world economy "the world is in a good, reasonable state, and that long term economic previsions are promising ...the economists think that advanced technologies may overpass all boundaries;

b) based in the indexes that measure the health of the environment “each major index shows a deterioration of natural systems: the grasslands are decreasing, the deserts are expanding, the land is losing the humus, the ozone stratum is getting thinner and thinner, the polluting gases are accumulating, the number of species of plants and animals is reducing, the air pollution is reaching levels that threaten people’s life in hundreds of cities, and the decay caused by acid rain are present on every continent.

The differences between the two opinions over the world become more obvious if we compare the main economic and ecologic indexes of the world we live in.

The period of time that the world has covered is that of an world economy that is not viable regarding the environment, based on unlimited growth phenomena. The new era that mankind must reach will have as common ground one fundamental idea: to comply the needs of present generations without compromising the potential of the future generation of complying their needs, too.

The environmental era that has to follow in the world’s evolution must begin by projecting an viable energetic system based on solar energy as energy source, and this will probably influence the economic pattern of the future, according to some specialists this will be the solar economy.

The transit to the environmental era of the durable development means recycling materials, drastic reduction of waste, the change of products and people’s reactions, giving up the society of wastage, as components of the “kind technologies strategy”, approaching the final aim of life insurance, as E.F. Schumacher stated: “the maximum welfare with the minimum consumption.”

In the vision of durable development there will be integrated an organic and strategic rethinking of urban transportation, considering that the technology may become a good servant, or a bad master if it will not be conceived in a manner of direct compatibility with people’s needs, in a healthy natural environment.

Based on common grounds, the strategy of durable development becomes operational through adequate national politics, capable to generate the compatibility of systems that will inter-condition each other in time and space, the regional, international and world wide collaboration and cooperation.

Placing the human being in the center of priorities, the durable development is not a purpose, but a means of humanizing the technical and economic progress, to distribute as equal as possible the effects upon the coexisting and following generations.

Although a fundamental request for all the countries of the world, the strategy of durable development must be approached considering the differences that exist today in the world, the division of the countries in developed ones and less developed ones, poor and rich, producers of nuclear weapons (anti-ecologic and against humans) and countries without a competitive defence.

In this context, even if the final target of the strategy of durable development is the same for all the countries, the actual issues that will be solved are very different from one country to another. The necessary financial resources as well as the ways of achievement depend on the difficulties, the people’s position regarding the aims of such long-term process, and the costs of it. The stages that follow as well as the period necessary to achieve these goals could not only be different, but also not synchronized, and this may compromise the whole action.

For the success of the new era of durable development, besides the national strategies based on own needs and resources, the national, international and even

world-wide strategies become of major importance. These must consider not only the globalization of durable development, but also the necessity to redistribute the effort and the intensity and extension of the damages of progress and natural environment produced by the states of the world.

For the economically developed countries, the new strategy imposes the transition to the restraint of social and economic activities, education, protection of people's health and conservationism. For poor countries and less developed ones, the problem is not stopping the economic development, but finding strategies that could respond in a favorable way both to labor productivity growth and to population, environment and life quality issues.

The new vision of durable development must also imply new strategies of an equal distribution of incomes and resources at the level of world countries, a "superior social order"- that is interested in the life of future generations as much as the present ones and that is more focused on the planet's and people's health than on material storage of military power.

The base of the new social order imposed by the durable development, the Declaration of Tokyo from February 27 1987, settles eight basic principles: the reinforcement of economic growth, a new quality in economic growth, the conservation and development of resources, to ensure and maintain the level of population's development, the reorientation of technology and the control upon its risks, the integration of environment and economic processes in the decisional act, the reformation of economic international relationships, the reinforcement of international cooperation.

## **2. Economic development and the conservationist matter**

One of the factors that economic growth is based on, and, on a larger scale of development, as mentioned before, is the ecologic or environmental factor. This generally consists in the interaction between the biotic community and the physical existential environment and its evolution, meaning the atmosphere, the lithosphere, the hydrosphere, the light and solar energy .

The important place and part of the environmental factor among the determinants of durable economic growth is obvious and inclusive in the following scheme elaborated by two important members of the Club from Rome.

The propulsion of the environmental factor in the center of the economic growth of the end of this century and millennium, is the consequence of the threat posed by pushing over the admissible limits of the discordance between the exploitation of nature and the importance of existential conditions and its normal functioning.

To incriminate industrialization and industrial civilization for the shortcomings manifested in the area of pollution and the inefficient management of resources, shown in some previous passages, would be a mistake. This would lead to the discouragement of scientific research and the application of its results in production. Not industry or industrialization are to be blamed for the multitude of aspects and components of the existing environmental crisis, but mankind, that in its rush after enrichment or "because of its greed and inattention" – as A. Toffler said – did not select and apply those conquests of science and technique that may lead to the protection and enrichment of nature and not to its destruction and impoverishment.

In other words, man is the one that must show the necessary discernment and responsibility in selecting and applying those results of industrial development, that

follow the laws of natural environment, and ensure the ecological balance, between what the nature gives and what we give to nature. In order to survive, we must learn to give back to nature the richness that we borrow from it.

In the acceptance outlined in the last years, the ecologic development means economic growth correlated and inter-conditioned by the laws of the environment, of ecological balance.

The recognition of the dependence of economic development on natural resources and their physical state and the concept of eco-development took place inside a long confrontation between numerous conceptions about the protection of natural environment, among which can be distinguished the egocentric conception, the biocentric conception and the anthropocentric conception.

Considering the common, rational and useful elements of the three conceptions, regarding the environmental protection, we can generalize the conception of man's reconciliation with himself and with nature.

This conception, that is the foundation of eco-development, includes the respect of the laws of nature in the economic life and generally the respect of economic balance of terrestrial health and its spheres, as well as for the progress of the whole human society.

The ecologic approach of growth and economic development raises a lot of more concrete questions, like the one of the internalization of conservation costs. Strictly economically speaking, the structure of the expenses made to obtain any production includes capital investments, exploiting and maintenance investments, as well as taxes. The previous years, under the incidence of environmental crisis, have shown that this structure is incomplete, the real costs of production must also consider the expenses made to neutralize or prevent the unwanted harming effects of production.

In the present conditions, of environmental crisis, the expenses for the protection and improvement of environment are being productive, because the practical measures financed by these have to maintain unharmed the environment and in the same time, gives new progress valences. In other words, these expenses not only that maintain the integrity of natural environment by prolonging its existence, but also may contribute to increasing its qualities. On the other hand, the reality proves that assets like water, air, light and solar energy, that used to have an utility that did not imply costs and could not be expressed by price, now involves expenses in order to be maintained and reproduced with their initial properties.

Usually the investments for natural environment protection bring positive long-term economic effects. Most times, these are prolonged long after their recovery limit.

The examination of all these aspects leads to the conclusion that all expenses made for the protection and improvement of natural environment are part of the global and total cost of production. They must be recuperated because they prove to be productive. To outlook these things, in the name of a so-called immediate "efficiency or profitability", would mean to ignore the reality, the costs that also imply the expenses for the prevention or neutralization of undesired effects. Without considering these costs, the economic activities would lead to severe unbalances both in the natural environment and in economy. Life proves that including these costs in the cost of the product (service) whose realization has generated them is more effective in the fight against pollution and decay of environmental conditions that the subvention by the state of the economic process.

Another truth that must be considered in the economic activity is the fact that the prevention of pollution and the decay of natural environment in general is far less

expensive than their remediation. This is valid as long as the limit has not yet been reached, the point from which no return could be possible any more. As consequence, it is necessary that the technical-economic research concerning investments, expenses to prevent or correct the decay of natural environment are not considered “auxiliary” of “optional”, but as an integrated and inseparable part of obligatory expenses of the construction of the aimed objective.

Recently, in the same time with the reconsideration of the increasing importance of the preoccupation concerning conservationism, there are persistent attempts to calculate the economic efficiency of this activity. Besides the special role of theory of the internalization of conservation costs, an important contribution is that of abandoning the wrong conceptions in former east-European, socialist countries that the natural resources have no value or price because they are not the subject of selling and buying. On this base, there were proposed some theoretical and practical solutions.

The problems of environmental protection and conservation have an increasing impact upon commercial connections, the “ecologic weapon” being more and more present in international economic relations. The countries that operate high ecological standards and norms are interested in their protection against competitors that are imposing less severe standards. The competing position of the partners depends on their capacity to ensure ecologically clean products, that correspond both to consumers’ exigency, and the norms applied to these by commercial partners. Like in the other domains of economic activity, the commercial and economic politics must support each other, to avoid, if possible, the use of commercial restrictions as substitute of protection measures, of norms and ecologic standards seen as disguised obstacles in the way of international commerce.

### **3. The social dimension if durable development.**

“The economic growth is a *sine non qua* condition of development. But, on the one hand, on long term, economic growth might compromise the welfare of future generations by its negative impact upon environment, by the exhaustion of natural resources, by reducing bio-diversity, by the negative consequences on public health and social inequities. On the other hand, economic growth does not immediately produce social cohesion or a better society.”(1)

As a response to high risks and costs of globalization, mainly in the second half of the nineties, a large international movement of cooperation determined a change of approach at the level of politics by the integration of “the principle of durability”. At a principle’s level, “the magical triangle”, formed by *economic growth, social cohesion and conservationism*, is the base of the elaboration, application and evaluation of all development politics.

The principle of durability is promoted as a connection between political decisions, both internal and external, of economic actions and public opinion, to guide institutional and structural reforms, with impact upon the production and consumption behaviour.

The durable development has got deep roots in the concept of fundamental social rights. As consequence, the fight against poverty and social exclusion, the promotion of equal chances and equity regarding the distribution of capital and incomes are central objectives of each durable development strategy. This is the reason why the national or global strategies of durable development must be in perfect coordination with the other elements of strategic planning aiming these objectives.

Social protection, environmental politics and economic and social cohesion have gradually become priority politics in the process of European integration. In 2000, the EC from Lisbon established a new strategic objective of European economy: “to become the most competitive and dynamic economy based on knowledge in the world, capable of sustainable growth, with more and better jobs and an increased rate of social cohesion”.

The social aspect of durable development at world level implies reaching the following objectives:

- fighting against poverty (by insuring the access of the poor to the sustainable means of subsistence, promoting the integrated politics of human development and investments in the human capital)
- demographic evolutions that endanger sustainable development (with accent on population growth, mainly in underdeveloped countries)
- protection and promotion of human health (focused on the access to medical facilities, especially in the rural areas, the control of infectious diseases, risks associated to pollution and ecological hazard)
- the reinforcement of farmers’ part in the elaboration and implementation of durable development strategies (focused on agriculture and agricultural practices, the insurance of residence and access to terrains for disadvantaged categories, the use of natural resources, the environmental protection in rural areas)
- promoting education, instruction and public support towards environmental matters and durable development.

Durable development implies social inclusion of individuals, using mechanisms of social integration and through access/participation to cultural life. In essence, durable development strategies are centered on the human beings, and this implies focusing the efforts of all social performers and generating dormant synergies from all the components of social system and natural environment. In the process of durable development, education, culture and civic spirit, transparency and efficiency of decisions, diplomacy, environment become strategic guides.

#### 4. Conclusions

The conclusions that rive from this work are that there are **solutions** for many aspects of economic development and growth that are partially ignored or applied, as lack of appropriate training and/or lack of vision.

**Decisions** are rarely valid, and the performers of development are not being guided by all the conditional principles below:

- **protecting and promoting fundamental rights** ( placing the human being in the center of national politics, by promoting fundamental rights, by fighting any form of discrimination and by contributing to the decrease of poverty and eliminating social exclusion);
- **solidarity inside the present generation and between generations** (addressing to present generations’ needs without compromising the capacity of future generations to ensure their basic needs, wherever these generations would be);
- **open and democratic society** (ensuring the civic rights of access to information and access to justice);
- **involving the citizens in the decisional process and the elaboration of normative acts** that affect them (the consolidation and citizens’ involvement in the decisional process; promoting education and public acknowledgement of the durable

development; informing citizens about the impact that they have upon environment and the options that they might have, making more durable choices);

- **involving businessmen and social partners** (engaging social dialog, introducing corporatist social responsibilities and public-private partnership in order to develop cooperation and common responsibilities and to reach durable production and consumption);

- **coherence of politics and quality government** (promotion of coherence between all European Union politics and between regional, national and global actions to increase their contribution to durable development);

- **integration of politics** (the promotion of integration of economic, social and environmental considerations, so that these may become coherent and support each other using all the instruments for a better regulation, for the equilibrate evaluation of impact and consults of interest owners);

- **using the best knowledge available** (ensuring that the politics are developed, evaluated and applied based on the best knowledge available and that they are economically efficient regarding costs);

- **the principle of caution** (where there aren't scientific certainties, there are applied evaluation procedures and it is acted in order to prevent and avoid damages for human health and for the environment);

- **the principle "the polluter pays"** (ensuring that the price reflects real costs for society of the production and consumption activities and that the polluter pays the damages he causes to human health and to environment).

If these principles are respected and applied in any sector's politic and if legislative measures are taken after a careful analysis regarding possible unwanted economic, ecologic and social effects than we will speak about integrated politics of durable development.

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